

Mission Frame House
(Mission Group)
King & Kawaiahao Streets
Honolulu
Honolulu County
Hawaii

HABS No. HI-21

*HABS
HI,
2-HONLU,
19-*

PHOTOGRAPHS

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MISSION FRAME HOUSE (MISSION GROUP)

HABS No. HI-21

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HI
2-HONOLU,
19-

ADDRESS: King and Kawaiahao Streets, Honolulu, Honolulu County, Hawaii

OWNER: Hawaiian Mission Children's Society

OCCUPANT: None

USE: Museum

ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The mission frame house stands on the mission grounds near Kawaiahao Church on King Street. It was one of the first frame buildings to be constructed in the Hawaiian Islands. The timbers of Maine white pine were cut and fitted in Boston in 1819 and came around the Horn on the brig Thaddeus with the pioneer mission company in April 1820. The frame of the house arrived on Christmas morning of that year on board the ship Tartar.¹

The house frame was unloaded on January 10, 1821, and placed in Governor Boki's yard for safe keeping while the mission appealed to King Kamehameha II, Liholiho, for permission to build their house. This proved to be a major stumbling block as the mission journal indicates:

"Brothers Bingham and Thurston visited the King again and found him awake, cheerful and friendly, and ready to return his 'Aloha'. They thanked him for former kindnesses, and told him as our good friends in America had been so kind as to send us a house frame, they wished his approbation to set it up. To this he gave a decided negative, pleading the example of his father, who he said, would not permit any foreigner to build a house on his Islands except for him. This was taken as decisive. We had been told before that it was taboo, so that we should not be allowed to build without an effort. Soon after Brother B. appealed to his compassion, saying that our females had been accustomed to have good floors to live on, and we feared that if they were obliged to sit and work and sleep on the damp ground, they might be sick and die especially as the seasons were sometimes wet and our present houses grass houses would not last long and ventured to propose again to set up the new house. He replied 'Hanahana (Do it)'. But he added, 'When you go away, take everything with you.'"

This permission was given on February 5, but two days later the missionaries were again stating their case to the King. This time, although appearing to be very affable, the King evaded a decision on the grounds that he was going to Maui for a few days and thought it would be best to wait for his return before commencing any work. One explanation for Liholiho's hesitation may be that the frame house would have been a much finer building than his own palace, which was still a grass house at this time. Despite the delay, by March 26, 1821, the missionaries began to remove their timber from Governor Boki's yard to the mission grounds in preparation for building. A few weeks later on April 20, Liholiho, together with several of the high chiefs, visited the mission families and the King confirmed his original permission and approved the construction of their permanent house.²

By April 28 the members of the mission had begun digging the collar for the house, lining it with mud and straw because of a lack of stone. Eventually the floor was paved with brick donated to the mission by a Captain Winship. These were the first bricks introduced in Hawaii. The Hawaiian people were amazed and frightened at the digging of the cellar, a facet of building construction previously unknown to them. Rumors were that the missionaries would secrete men, guns, and powder there in preparation for the day when they would kill the King and seize the Government. So thoroughly was this believed, that it is said that in order to be in readiness for the attack, one of the chiefs began to build a house on the opposite side of the street from the mission with an even larger cellar. Liholiho, however, put little credence in these rumors.³

The erection of the house frame began a few days later, but again the missionaries were faced with difficulties. Natives had carried off some of the timbers from Governor Boki's yard, some had been damaged by long exposure to the sun, and, as the mission journal continues,

"Near half of the joists and some of the studs and boards are missing. Several of the boards were used by Capt. Blanchard /of the Thaddeus/ while on the passage and some of the smaller timbers were cut or broken in building and launching the schooner of Capt. B. He promised to bring us timber and boards from the Coast. But as yet we have received no remuneration for the loss we have sustained."

They also discovered that no boards for the roof of the building had been landed. In order to supply this deficiency, the mission purchased an additional 1000 feet of lumber from a ship's captain and by May 8 shingling of the house had begun. Additional lumber was needed for the interior work and the need was met in mid-September 1821 by the gift of timber and boards from two ship captains in port.⁴

The Daniel Chamberlains with their six children were the first occupants of the house, moving in the last part of August 1821, followed by the Loomises, Thurstons and Bingham in October. Mrs. Thurston described her new home as

"having board floors, glass windows, and two flights of stairs leading the one up chamber, and the other down cellar. The front door opened into a hall, which extended through the house. At the right, on entering, was the large common receiving room. On the left, my own private apartment. The two back rooms on either side of the hall were for the accommodation of two other families /The Loomises and D. Chamberlains; the Bingham were using the half-story upstairs/. The table was spread in the basement, and the cook-house was separated a little distance from the house."

Such comfort was short-lived. Six months later in April 1822, we find four single men - one a gold smith using his room as a shop and three from the London Missionary Society - visiting the house for a period of four months and each occupying a separate room. This meant a total of 12 adults and 12 children in the house, 16 of them housed on the second

floor, and up to 50 gathering for meals three times daily at the "long table" in the cellar. Still there were few complaints. "Here we could all have been comparatively comfortable had it not been for the burning sun beating on the roof and the unclapboarded sides of the house."⁵

By October 1824 it was obvious something would soon have to be done about the unfinished siding on the house before another rainy season began. The house had been covered with rough boards which had been feather-edged. Not only did dust and heat penetrate the walls, but rain did also. In 1821, the mission had been given enough paper to paper all their rooms, one of which had been finished. Although the studs and braces were not concealed from view by this method, it gave a finished appearance to the room. Now, however, with the onset of the rainy season, the paper was being damaged by leakage. As a stop-gap measure, strips of cloth dipped in tar were stuck into the cracks between the boards. But the boards, too, were being damaged by exposure to the weather. Shingles were discussed as a solution to the problem, but as they were too expensive and difficult to obtain, the idea was discarded. It was decided, instead, to remove the enclosing boards, slit, plane, and replace them in the manner of clapboards at a cost of \$45 for a carpenter. To preserve the boards, two coats of paint mixed with fish oil were put on the house. This work was finished by Christmas 1824. At the same time alterations were made inside the house, changing the interior stairs and adding a partition across the entry to form a new apartment.⁶

Several additional interior changes were made in the next few years. In March 1827 Levi Chamberlain's journal records that Mr. Bingham was making alterations in the east end of the house,

"enlarging the front room and constructing the common eating room into a lodging apartment to be separated from the cook-house by a partition forming a passageway from the cook house to the front room which will be more commodious for entertaining company and will serve a convenient room for meetings."

In 1828 the two rooms on the ewa or western end of the house were thrown together by removing the partitions. The Judd family occupied this room, Dr. Judd using a portion for his medical office. At the same time an addition, 15½ feet by 17 feet was attached to the east end of the house to serve as a bedroom for the Bingham family. This addition was removed many years later. Changes were also made in the half-story above which had originally been one large room. Partitions had been put in to afford privacy to the growing mission family and in 1829 the roof was extended to provide for another upstairs room.⁷

No record of extensive repairs or alterations to the frame house between 1830 and 1907 has been found. The house continued to be a home to the mission families and other visitors until 1851 when the Cooke family bought the building and the coral printing house adjoining it. According to a friend of the Cooke family, Mrs. J.M. Cooke occupied the house until 1880; then for eight years, other family members and friends lived there. Afterward, the building stood unoccupied for a number of years, falling into disrepair. When Mrs. Cooke died in 1896 she left the house to the Hawaiian Board of Missions. Put up for auction by the Board, it was bought by Mrs. Cooke's son, A.F. Cooke. He had the house reshingled and some minor repairs were made.⁸

In 1904 at a meeting of the Hawaiian Mission Children's Society, also known as the Cousin's Society, it was suggested that the mission frame house be obtained as a home for the Society. In 1906 the house was sold by A.F. Cooke to C.M. Cooke, Ltd. In 1907 Mr. Charles M. Cooke offered to lease it to the HMCS for twenty years at a dollar a year with the idea

that if they were interested enough to keep it in good condition it might ultimately be ceded to them as, in fact, it was in 1925. A committee was appointed to look into the condition of the house. Several contractors were called in to examine the building which was found to be so badly eaten by insects as to be considered beyond repair. Various suggestions were made for restoration, such as an inside steel frame to hold the house up or the injection of liquid cement into the timbers, but the cost was prohibitive. After considerable study the HMCS committee submitted their report, recommending extensive repairs to restore the house to its original appearance. The cost of these repairs when completed was approximately \$1500. (See appendix A).⁹

In 1925 when the HMCS gained title to the house, the premises were again inspected and again extensive insect damage was found. A.E. Arledge, who inspected the house, advised that the first floor was unsafe for more than six people in any one room or concentrated location, but it could easily be strengthened by studding and shoring without removing any of the old timber. This would make the house safe for three to four years and cost about \$150. But Arledge urged that permanent repairs be considered. It was another ten years, however, before funds could be raised for a complete restoration, but the need had been seen and several plans were discussed in the meantime. In April 1930, C.W. Dickey, Architect, submitted specifications for constructing an inner concrete shell around which the original wood frame and interior could be placed. Dickey estimated the cost at about \$6900, but pointed out that this would be fireproof, insured against insect damage, and the original exterior appearance of the house would be retained. This plan was not approved, however, for it was felt that the concrete shell would make the walls too thick and destroy the original proportions of the house.¹⁰

By 1935 the H.M.C.S. was able to procure sufficient funds to completely renovate and restore the frame house. C.W. Dickey was again consulted and his specifications for the work were submitted in September 1934. His plan was to retain the original thickness of the walls, partitions, and floors as well as original clapboards, doors, windows, cupboards, and shutters, but to replace the wood framework with termite-proof lumber. (See appendix B). Detailed photographs of every room were taken before the work started. As a result, the house looks exactly as it did before, both inside and out, but it is strong and well built. (See appendix C).¹¹

Since 1935 various minor repairs such as repainting and some replastering have been undertaken. Today the old mission frame house is maintained by the Hawaiian Mission Children's Society as a memorial to the early missionary effort in the Hawaiian Islands. Mementoes and furniture of the first mission families are displayed in the house, together with photographs of the men and women who lived and worked there.

Footnotes: (Manuscript material is available at H.M.C.S. Library, Honolulu, Hawaii)

¹The Friend, May 1935, page 502.

Thaddeus Journal, December 25, 1820, page 98.

²Thaddeus Journal, January 10, 1821, page 104.

" " , February 5, 1821, page 111.

" " , February 7, 1821, page 112.

E. Loomis Journal, 11, 332, March 26, 1821.

Hiram Bingham, A Residence of 21 Years, April 20, 1821, page 132.

³Thaddeus Journal, April 28, 1821, pages 140-141.

Dibble's History of the Sandwich Islands, page 152.

E. Loomis Journal, 11, 354, May 4, 1821.

⁴E. Loomis Journal, 11, 332, April 2, 1821.

Missionary Letters, 1, 89-90, May 4, 1821.

Thaddeus Journal, May 1, 1821, page 141.

E. Loomis Journal, 11, 354, May 4, 1821.

- Thaddeus Journal, September 17, 1821, page 166.
E. Loomis Journal, III, 424, September 25, 1821.
- ⁵The Life and Times of Mrs. Lucy G. Thurston, page 63.
Journal of the Sandwich Islands Mission, April 29, 1822.
Mrs. Tytus Coan, Mrs. Sybil Moseley Bingham, pages 10-11.
- ⁶E. Loomis Journal, II, 400.
L. Chamberlain Journal, III, 102, October 26, 1824.
Journal of the Sandwich Islands Mission, October 26, 1824.
L. Chamberlain Journal, IV, 6, December 25, 1824.
- ⁷L. Chamberlain Journal, VII, 21, March 10, 1827.
Missionary Letters, VIII, 240, August 31, 1827.
L. Chamberlain Journal, XIII, 2, July 14, 1829.
- ⁸C.P. Dodge, The Maile Wreath, pages 29-30.
Manuscript Letter, E.M. Damon to S. Judd, June 12, 1952.
HMCS Annual Report, 1897, page 37.
Thrum's Hawaiian Annual, 1897, pages 112-117.
- ⁹HMCS Annual Report, 1907, page 9.
HMCS Annual Report, 1909, pages 83-87.
HMCS Annual Report, 1910, pages 3-4.
- ¹⁰HMCS Annual Report, 1925, page 10.
Manuscript Letter, A.E. Alexander to HMCS, March 4, 1925.
HMCS Annual Report, 1928, page 5.
Manuscript Letter, C.W. Dickey to H.H. Hitchcock, August 4, 1931.
- ¹¹HMCS Annual Report, 1935, pages 7-9.
HMCS Annual Report, 1936, page 7.
Manuscript Letter, C.W. Dickey to R.H. Rice, September 4, 1934.

Prepared by:

Karmen Tiahrt
Hawaii State Archives
August 1967

A: HACS, Minutes of Board of Managers Meeting, January 23, 1907.

"That the building be made water tight at once, and those sills and beams which, upon examination, prove to be rotten be replaced; that the partitions lately placed in the building be removed and the house restored as to its original conditions as far as possible; that the plastering be repaired; the floors renewed and the room repapered; that the roof be re-shingled with shingles dipped in oil; that the kitchen be re-slatted, it now consisting partly of shingles and partly of slate, ... that all the old hardware be preserved or replaced; that window casing be put in to slide in the sills as appears to have been the original method; that all the medicine and book shelves be retained; that a new front door similar to others in the building be made and put in place; and that the exterior of the building be painted." This cost for these repairs was estimated at \$1500.

B: Manuscript Letter, C.W. Dickey to R.H. Rice, September 4, 1934.

"Second Floor: install new floor joists and tight T&G floor to receive present plank floor and patch same as first floor.

Roof: build new roof exactly like present roof but using Transite Asbestos shingles (similar to those on Halekulani Hotel) in place of wood shingles. Install new ceiling joists.

Kitchen: repair old stone walls and clean up or replaster same, as the Committee may decide.

Replace or repair old windows and doors, and other wood work.

Provide new plank floor for passage from kitchen to main house to look as much as possible like old plank floor.

Porch: rebuild porch of new materials.

Plaster: complete new plaster job for 1st and 2nd stories.

Treated Lumber: all new lumber both for structural and finished work to be treated by either the Zinc Chloride or the Zinc - Meta - Arsenite process to render it termite proof, dry-rot proof and comparatively fire-proof.

In General: as much of the old materials to be retained as is practicable but the estimate is high enough to permit of replacing all present wood work with new wood work of treated lumber.

All work to be painted to correspond with old work and an appearance of age to be maintained."

Rest of letter concerns financing by HACS.

(Manuscript material is available at HACS Library, Honolulu, Hawaii)

C : Additional visual material available in the Hawaiian Mission Children's Society Library.

1. 1935 Restoration (referred to in Appendix C)
 - a. Architects Blueprints
 - b. 25 - 5" x 7" glossy prints of interior and exterior views before and during restoration, showing exposed structural framing, etc.
2. Early exterior views - photographs of varying size.
 - a. Negative 20 - King Street elevation (1865-1870) showing demolished (1890's) one-story wing on left (Waikiki) and large porch on King Street.
 - b. Negative 495 - close-up of one-story wing noted in "a" above.
 - c. Negative 498 - shows different front porch on King Street and trace where wing (noted in "a") was removed.
 - d. Negative 505 - Exposed coral walls of kitchen prior to 1935 restoration with corrugated metal roof.
 - e. Negative 511 - shows third type of front porch on King Street (dated 1906).

Mission Frame House
553 South King Street
City and County of Honolulu, Oahu, Hawaii

GENERAL STATEMENT

Architectural interest and merit:

One of the most interesting architectural facts about this particular structure is its literal New England origin. Lumber for this New England plan type was actually pre-cut prior to shipment around the Horn. It may be considered in a broad sense, therefore, a very early example of pre-fabrication. It also has the distinction of being one of the first wood frame houses in the islands. Architecturally, its simple and straightforward expression, the relatively low ceilings, and basement are strong evidence of its New England concept, alien to the temperate climate of Honolulu.

Having been restored in 1935 and maintained by a dedicated group of descendants of the early missionaries for whom it was built, it stands in relatively good condition.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE EXTERIOR

This existing house consisting of two stories plus a basement measures 40' - 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ " in length and 24' - 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ " in depth excluding the kitchen wing which extends the basic rectangular plan on the right rear (ewa-makai) by 20' - 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". The overall height from grade to roof peak is 23' - 7".

Foundations:

The foundation wall varies from 9" to 1' - 2" in thickness, except on the left (Waikiki) side where it becomes an average of 1' - 10" and where a now demolished wing once stood. The walls are adobe brick set in a mud mortar. Reinforced concrete buttresses were built against the inner surfaces in the basement in the 1935 restoration. In addition, irregularly square piers of coral rock support interior beams. There is a display panel which

exposes the adobe brick in the transverse interior bearing wall at the loft (Waikiki) end of the basement.

Structural system:

According to an article in the Friend, September, 1935 (see appendix A) by Mr. Dickey, Architect for the 1935 Restoration, all wood framework was replaced with termite-proof wood. The article further states that original siding, flooring, doors, window, cupboards, etc., which was retained was individually treated and re-used. Mr. Dickey also installed steel beams cased in wood to carry floor loads as well as a reinforced concrete perimeter beam on the exterior walls.

The semi-round roughly-squared timbers of the roof rafters and beams may possibly be original or re-used.

Porches, stoops, bulkheads:

There are two sets of coral rock stoops on the King Street (mauka) elevation and one stoop of the same material on the rear (makai). The latter is not aligned axially with the stoop at the main entrance, but rather with a window. There is no protective roof at either.

There is also a small two-story wood framed porch on the right side (ewa) of obvious latter date.

There are, in addition, coral rock bulkheads at both the front and rear, which enclose a coral rock stairs to the basement.

Early photographs in the Mission Society Library indicate there have been at least three different porches on the front (King Street).

Chimneys:

The single chimney which is at the end of the kitchen wing is of a coral rock, plastered on the exterior with cement stucco. It is 15 feet high. The arched head of the opening is supported by two 2" wide curved iron straps, bent so horizontal legs are built into the masonry side walls of the fireplace. A hanging pot crane is also built in. The hearth is stone.

Openings - doorways and doors:

The three exterior doors on the ground floor are all treated similarly with plain unmoulded trim. The two exterior doors to the basement are set into the basement walls without trim. A ventilating transom covered with wire mesh is set over these basement doors. On the King Street front (mauka), the wood door is 6-paneled; on the rear (makai), there is a 2-light transom over the 6-paneled door; the door on the porch on the east (ewa) is a dutch door of vertical boards on the exterior fastened to horizontal boards on the interior; the kitchen door is also Dutch, consisting of two wide vertical boards, braced on the interior with horizontal rails. The two basement doors are also vertical planks.

Windows and shutters:

The majority of the windows are 6/6 wood double-hung, using iron pins instead of sash weights. Exceptions are a fixed six-light window on the second floor, a 6/6 sliding wood window and a six-light fixed wood window in the kitchen. The smaller window openings on the second floor have adjustable wood louvered shutters without windows.

Roof - shape, covering:

The gabled roof over the main house and the kitchen are both covered with asbestos shingles.

Cornice, eaves:

The cornice board is a simple flat band with a narrow moulding at the top.

Dormers:

There is a wide gabled dormor with a single window on the front (King Street), with the plastered ceiling on the interior being arched.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERIOR

The Basement in plan consists of one room on the left (Waikiki) and a larger space on the right. The latter is divided by a stud partition and large square plastered stone piers. Access is by an exterior coral stair on both the front and rear and an interior concrete stair leading down from the kitchen. All walls are plastered, the floors are brick and the ceiling exposed wood.

The first floor plan which has been altered by both additions and demolition (on the left) consists of two rooms across the front. A smaller room and stairhall are located behind the front room on the left. The room on the left extends through the depth of the house, and connected by a doorway to the kitchen wing on the rear, and one to the covered porch on the right. The rear part of this porch has been enclosed. There is also a stairway leading from this large room up to the second floor.

The second floor consists essentially of two large rooms separated by a stairhall. Under the eaves on each side smaller rooms have been partitioned off. In the right rear corner there is the second stairway down to the large room below.

Stairways:

When the house was first enlarged, the original stairway was relocated and

the second stairway in the rear right corner was added. Both stairs are ell-shaped with winders. Both are enclosed except for the wood balustrade at the head of the centrally located stair.

Flooring:

The floors are brick set in earth in the basement, cement in the kitchen and random width boards in the first and second floors.

Wall and ceiling finish:

Walls are plaster on adobe brick in the basement, plaster on coral rock in the kitchen and plaster on wood framing in the first and second floor. There are also two painted plank partitions on the second floor. Ceilings are exposed wood framing in the basement and kitchen and plaster in the main house.

Doorways and doors:

Several types of doors are found in the house. Some are 4-panel on either one or both sides and others are 6-paneled on one side only. There is also a cased opening in the left front room. Doors in the small built-in cupboards are also paneled.

Decorative features and trim:

The base boards are all flat unmoulded. Door and window trim is simple with small framing moulding. The rooms downstairs and the major rooms upstairs have narrow moulded chair rails and picture rails. Wood clock shelves are also installed in several rooms.

Notable hardware:

Door latches are of two general types: the flat door pull and thumb latch, and the more decorative spool handle with scalloped escutcheon plate. There are also several sliding lock bolts surface mounted.

Lighting: None.

Heating (fireplaces):

The only fireplace is the stone fireplace in the kitchen. The opening is slightly arched. A swinging pot crane is embedded in the inner rock walls.

SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

Orientation and general setting:

On the south side of King Street, the Mission Frame House is on the left (Waikiki) side of the Mission Printing Office, one of the three mission buildings on the property.

Outbuildings:

Adjacent in the rear is a small frame structure containing rest room facilities.

Landscaping:

The three Hawaiian Mission Children's Society's buildings are set back from King Street on a grass lawn, enclosed by a low coral rock wall with iron gates.

Typical plants, trees and shrubs are informally scattered on the lawn.

Some of these are the Banana tree, Royal poinciana, Pili, Ti, Hibiscus, and the Octopus tree.

Prepared by:

Woodrow W. Wilkins
Supervisory Architect
HABS Hawaii II Project

August 1967